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FAMOUS NAVAL DUEL.

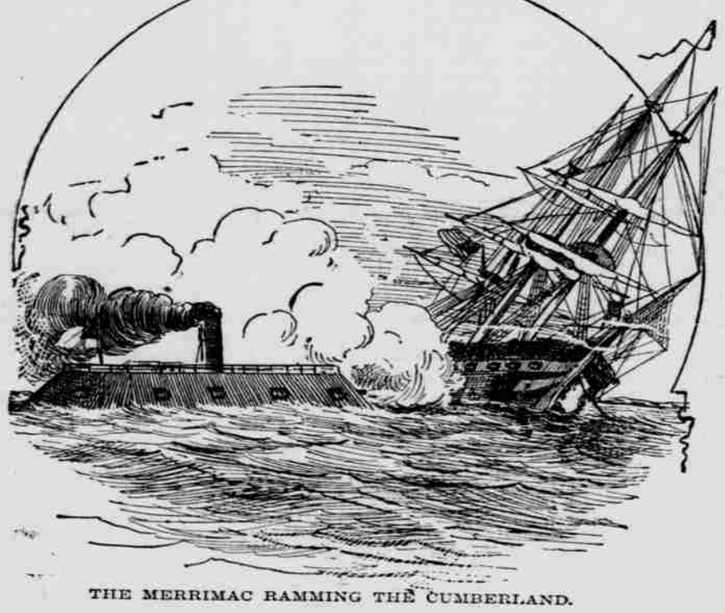
Memories of the Merrimac and Monitor Engagement.

The Confederate Ram's Destruction of the Federal Frigates Cumberland and Congress and Her Defeat by Ericson's Queer Craft.

[Special Norfolk (Va.) Letter.]

A few days ago I sailed out into Hampton Roads to view the scene of the greatest naval engagement in the history of the world, all of which I heard and part of which I saw from our camp a short distance up the James river. This was 34 years ago, and though a mere boy, the grand scene of the explosion and the terrible noise of the cannonading is still fresh in my memory. It was grand and sublime; yet, horrible in its execution.

This memorable battle was witnessed by the land and naval forces of both armies in the immediate vicinity, many officers and soldiers coming down to get a nearer view as soon as the cannonading began. On the 8th of March, 1862, about one o'clock in the afternoon, when the ram Merrimac, or Virginia, was seen steaming out toward the federal blockade in Hampton Roads, the city of Norfolk was wild with excitement, and the old citizens still delight in relating the events of that memorable time. Those who did not take to the woods or cellars swarmed upon the beach and enjoyed the combat, though with considerable misgivings, for the confederate steamer, Virginia, and the few land batteries at Sewall's Point were the only defenses to Norfolk. As the Virginia slowly passed out to attack the blockading squadron she was cheered by citizens and the soldiers at the batteries who stood upon the parapets wildly waving their hats, and eager to witness the fray which was soon to begin within easy cannon shot. The blockading squadron consisted of the frigates Cumberland and Congress off Newport News, of 30 and 80 guns, respectively. A few miles out, under frowning Fortress Monroe, were three other frigates and half a dozen gunboats, all of which could have been available within half an hour after the beginning of the battle.



THE MERRIMAC RAMMING THE CUMBERLAND.

It was a calm, hazy afternoon, and while the intention of the confederates was known, the wild and hazardous attempt to smash the blockade was not expected that afternoon at least, for the vessels wore a half-holiday appearance. In fact, it was washday, and the rigging was full of sailors' clothes hung out to dry.

When within about a mile of the first blockaders, according to the statements of some of those who viewed it at a safe distance, the Cumberland and Congress opened fire upon the Merrimac (or Virginia), followed by the land batteries. The shots seemingly had about as much effect upon the ironclad as would pouring water upon a duck's back. The Merrimac wisely reserved her fire until within a few hundred yards of the Cumberland, when she gave her a shot, and immediately so maneuvered as to give the Congress a broadside.

She then made direct for the Cumberland, striking her almost at right angles, and opening a hole in her large enough to "drive in a horse and buggy," as a spectator expressed it. "The masts began to totter as if she was in a gale, and in a few minutes she went down with a roar, and her crew with her, sinking in 50 feet of water with her flag still flying." The ram had become detached and was left in the hull of the sinking Cumberland, rendering her almost powerless for future harm in that line, like a bee which leaves its sting in the object attacked.

The Merrimac then turned her attention to the Congress, which vessel had been showering shot upon her all the time, and opened on her when within about 200 yards. In the meantime the sinking Cumberland, with flag still flying, never ceased to fire, until the crew were driven from their guns by the rapidly-filling water, and within half an hour from the beginning of the attack she went down with more than a hundred souls.

The Congress continued the fight for about an hour, assisted by three other vessels; and three of the James river fleet came on the troubled scene to assist the confederate monitor. In the meantime two of the federal fleet ran aground, as had the Congress. Being thus practically alone, the Congress run up the white flag. Still in the confusion and smoke of battle, the federal shore batteries continued firing, killing some confederates and their own wounded who were being taken from the grounded Congress. As the Monitor drew twenty-three feet of water, and could not draw off her prize, hot shot was fired into the vessel, and she was soon ablaze. The flames crept up the rigging, the masts and spars and sails illuminated the sky in zigzag lines of dazzling fire. For several hours the flames raged. Night had come, mild and calm, and the beauty of the southern skies made the weird scene one never to be forgotten. The black hull of the vessel was reflected by the glittering fire in the almost calm waters upon whose bosom such a bloody tragedy was being enacted. Slowly the fire reached the loaded guns and shells, which burst as peals of thunder, reverberating and echoing over the bay, filling the air with engines of death. Shortly after midnight the flames reached the powder magazine, a huge volume of smoke arose from the vessel, followed by a red flame as if from the crater of a volcano, and after the stillness of a second, which seemed an age, there was a terrific roar, and the air was filled with cannon balls, fragments of the vessel, and dead bodies of human beings. The vessel had blown up, leaving only her black hulk, even at the water's edge.

The Merrimac, having lost only a few men, including Commander Buchanan, who was severely wounded, now retired under the confederate batteries at Sewall's point, intending to return next morning and finish up the remaining portion of the blockading fleet.

Accordingly, next morning about daylight, the victorious Merrimac, minus her ram, slowly steamed out into Hampton Roads, to begin where she had left off, nothwithstanding that it was Sunday and a day of rest. She would have rammed at and perhaps sunk the other vessels with her broken prow on the day before, only that they were aground and could not be reached. So, no sooner had she opened fire on the Minnesota, still aground than out stepped the little Monitor and blazed away as an intimation that she would take a hand in the free-for-all fight. This was as much a surprise to the confederates as the sudden attack of the day before was to the federals. The Monitor had only arrived the night before at Fort Monroe, just in time to hear the heavy firing and see the blowing-up of the Congress. The Monitor, also, had been hastily completed at New York, and hurried to the scene without the usual trial trip. She was of light draft, and maneuvered better than the Merrimac. The fun began about seven o'clock, lasting until two, when the Monitor crossed over into a channel where the heavy-draft Merrimac could not follow, and she also retired. This terrible artillery duel was within very close range, never further than half a mile, and often the vessels were not 20 feet apart—the intention of the Merrimac was to board and capture the queer-looking Monitor. The Merrimac lost only two killed and 19 wounded. The Monitor suffered an equal loss, her captain being totally blinded by powder.

The battle was witnessed by thousands, many of whom still live to tell the story as if they were in it. Though the battle was a draw, both vessels were short-lived. The confederates burned the Merrimac on evacuating Norfolk, and the Monitor was lost in a gale off Cape Hatteras a few months later.

J. M. SCANLAND.

THEATER FOR VETERANS

Latest Addition to the Soldiers' Home at Washington.

An Anecdote of Andrew Jackson—Why He Wouldn't Cashier Old Col. Blank—Good Care Taken of Old Soldiers.

[Special Washington Letter.]

The charges were brief, but the testimony and finding of the court covered a number of pages. Across the face of each page President Andrew Jackson wrote the word "disapproved," and returned the case to the war department.

The colonel was getting to be an old man. In common with the custom of that day he was given to the excessive use of liquor, and had been repeatedly cautioned and reproved by the general commanding the department. But warnings and reproofs were of no avail, and the old soldier was finally court-martialed.

The general charge was "conduct unbecoming an officer and a gentleman," and the specifications particularized the times and occasions when the veteran had offended because of his weakness in that one particular. He was never accused of disobedience of orders, or of any other breach of discipline. But, as he grew older, the habit grew stronger until he was apparently unable to control his appetite, and so he was court-martialed. His defense was well conducted, but he was convicted on every count, and the findings of the court-martial were approved by his immediate superior and forwarded to Washington, where the senior general of the army approved them, and the secretary of war forwarded the entire case to the white house for the approval of President Jackson.

When the papers were returned to the war department, with the emphatic disapproval of the president, there was consternation in army circles, and the secretary of war went to the white house to protest. He said: "Mr. President, I realize that no one has a right to question your action in any case, for, under the constitution, you are the commander in chief of the army and navy. But, after I had carefully examined the case of Col. Blank, I approved the findings and forwarded the case for your approval, and you have not only disapproved of the action of the court, but you have disapproved my judgment, and written your disapproval across every page, showing an emphatic disregard of the action of the war department, including your secretary of war. I would like to know, if you do not object, what reasons you had for such action in this case."

Gen. Jackson replied: "Of course, Mr. Secretary, you have no right to question my action in any case. But as you have respectfully asked for my reason, I will give it to you. The habit of strong drink comes to nearly every man who serves his country in actual warfare. Those who escape are exceptions to the rule. I am an old soldier myself, and am inclined to look with great leniency upon the weaknesses of men whom I have known as soldiers in actual field service. Old Col. Blank served under me in the Seminole war and was with me at New Orleans. I saw him render service of

GEN. DAVID STANLEY.

such merit that his country ought never to disgrace or degrade him. Consequently, so long as I am president, I shall emphatically disapprove any effort which may be made to dismiss him or any other good soldier from the army in disgrace. In fact, I believe that a man who has risked his life repeatedly and rendered gallant service where bullets and cannon balls were flying, has earned a right to get as drunk as he pleases. I will relieve Col. Blank of duty, and have him placed on waiting orders."

Andrew Jackson was an extreme man. He hated his enemies, and he hated the enemies of his country. He loved his friends, and he loved all of his old soldiers. He would defend them, even when they were wrong. That is to say, he would protect them, and make all charitable allowances for them. It was the intensity of his radical nature which led him to say that a gallant soldier on the battlefield earned the right to get drunk. Very few would agree with him in this day and age, when the temperance sentiment is overspreading the land. But even the most extreme of us in the temperance cause can understand that Jackson's expression was merely his extreme determination to protect with charitable consideration the old soldier whom he had seen serving his country in the fire and flame of awful conflict and in the midst of deadly carnage.

In those days pensions were not liberally bestowed, and the old soldiers, in times of peace, were kept on the pay roll and cared for as though on actual duty. Nowadays things are different. Disabled soldiers receive pensions, and old soldiers who are unable to care for themselves are given food, shelter and raiment in the soldiers' homes. The deserving officers of the regular army are placed on the retired list, and have ample incomes from the government to support them.

No king, prince or potentate has a better home even in his prime than the old soldiers of the regular army have in the national soldiers' home on the heights north of the national capital. The home is situated in a park nearly two miles square, and the grounds are better kept and more beautiful than the grounds of the king and emperors of the middle ages; and the home itself is a perfect palace for the old campaigners. Visitors to this city always drive there and their trip through the park is always one of their most pleasant memories of their sojourn here.

On pension day, when the quarterly pensions are paid to the veterans, they come to town and many of them indulge too freely in liquor and are taken to station houses and locked up over night. The police court judge recently dismissed a couple of cases of

SOLDIERS' HOME THEATER.

this kind, saying: "The police of this city know that these old soldiers are not vagabonds. They have a home, and all of the policemen know where it is. Any well-dressed department clerk taken in an intoxicated condition will be sent to his home in a cab. Hereafter I wish that when these old soldiers fall by the wayside the policeman discovering them would call an ambulance and send them to their home."

That is good common sense, and emanates from a spirit of charitableness somewhat like the spirit which animated Andrew Jackson when he stood between his old comrade and dismissal from the army. There is no reason why these old soldiers who have this weakness should be locked up and dragged before a police court, when our dudes and lordlings are tenderly cared for.

Everything that can be done is being done to add to the attractions of the soldiers' home, and now they are to have a theater for the purpose of keeping them home and amusing them at night. The building is of marble exterior and is almost completed. It is next to the library building, and opposite to Scott hall, a building named after Gen. Winfield Scott, the founder of the home.

The stage is to be 66 feet wide and 25 deep, with a proscenium opening of 32 feet, allowing plenty of room in the wings for stage apparatus. Inasmuch as the stage is the most important feature of any playhouse, it will be observed that the architect has devoted an unusual amount of space to this feature of the new theater. On the right hand side of the proscenium on the stage, an electric light switchboard is to be placed, and an operator at this point will have charge of all the lights in the house, as well as on the stage. Handsome scenery of the "up-to-date" variety is being prepared, and everything correlative done to make this theater for the old soldiers one of the finest and most complete in the country.

The old soldiers are not to have the privilege of hearing the greatest actors and actresses; at least not this year. They do not go to theaters to criticise or analyze the play, but to be entertained. Consequently, they will not demand the finest elocutionary efforts. Under the directions of Gen. David Stanley, who has charge of the soldiers' home, some of the leading amateurs of Washington, young men and women who intend to make a profession of the stage, have organized what is known as the "Soldiers' Home Dramatic company," and they are rehearsing new plays all the time, for the purpose of giving the old soldiers plenty of entertainment next fall and winter. We have several amateur dramatic companies in Washington, nearly all of them being composed of high-school graduates.

There will be a good orchestra for the new theater, and it will not cost anything. The regular soldiers home band, which gives such excellent open air concerts during the summer evenings that hundreds of people go from this city to hear them will form an orchestra, and the performers on the stringed instruments are now making preparations for their practice with the cornetists and other members of the proposed orchestra. Altogether this new theater is to be a creditable affair, and will add much to the enjoyment of the veterans who have served their country, and who are now passing off of the stage of life, after having acted well their parts.

SMITH D. FRY.

Drawing the Credit Line.

Merchant Tailor—I am sorry to say it, Mr. Goodheart, but as this is your wedding suit I must demand cash on delivery.

Mr. Goodheart—Eh? Why, I've had an account with you for years, and I've always paid promptly to the hour, the very hour, sir.

"Yes, Mr. Goodheart, but you were a bachelor, and had the handling of your own money."—N. Y. Weekly.

Her Sex Unreasoning.

"There's no use talking," began Mrs. Gobang.

"I know it," interrupted Gobang, "and the fact that you persist in talking after making that declaration simply proves what I have often asserted, regarding the lack of logic in the female sex. Now proceed with your lecture."—Truth.

THE GREEN BEFORE THE RED.

Pat (sympathetically)—Shmall wondher farr yez aggrissiveniss, me green frind, yez moosht be afther hovin' a premonition av th' color degradation that's about to kim upon yez.—N. Y. World.

Auntie Had Done Her Best.

Susie—And so you are an old maid, auntie; a real old maid?

Aunt Ethel—Yes, Susie, dear; I am a real old maid.

Susie (wishing to be nice and comforting)—Well, never mind, poor, dear auntie, I am sure it isn't your fault.—Tit-Bits.

The Theme.

When two soft arms encircle
In affectionate embrace
A fellow's neck and two brown eyes
Look up into his face
With glances full of meaning,
And the touch of two wee hands
Smooth out dull care's furrows,
It's then Dan Cupid's bands
Are spliced into his heartstrings
And he thanks his lucky star
That she'd vouchsafed such happiness
That naught on earth can mar.
But, ah, the sad reaction,
And bitter thoughts set free,
When the sealskin sacque's delivered
With a bill stamped "C. O. D."
—Somerville Journal.

It Was Reminiscent.

They stood on the beach and watched the ripples break on the pebbly strand. The wind whirled the loose strands of hair about her pretty eyes.

"Mabel," he said, in his deep, manly profundo, "will you think of me when you recall this charming scene?"

"Why, George," she gravely answered, "there is but one thing here to remind me of you."

"And what is that, Mabel?"

"The breeze, George—it's so fresh!"—Cleveland Plain Dealer.

An English Joke.

Husband—What! You want more money! Why, only yesterday I gave you five pounds.

Wife—Yes, but I spent that on a new bonnet.

H.—But I gave it to you for food; you can't feed yourself with a new bonnet.

W.—I can feed part of myself with it.

H.—Whatever do you mean, woman?

W.—Why, I can feast my eyes on it.—London Fun.

An Improvement.

"I am very well satisfied," said the new boarder; "in fact, I have only one suggestion to make."

"And what is that?" asked the landlady, beaming.

"If you could only manage to have the water in the ice tank as cold as that we get in the bath tub—"

But she didn't wait to hear.—Detroit News.

Prohibited.

A western hotel-keeper has added the following to the usual rules and regulations found in hotel rooms:

"No murdering or suciding allowed in this room. Guests breaking this rule will be requested to leave. All dying strictly forbidden on these premises."—N. Y. World.

HOW WILL HE CUT IT?

Hard Times, Indeed.

Charlie Bondclipper — What makes you so blue this morning? I suppose you went to see your uncle again?

Johnnie Fewscads — You are mistaken. I am no longer in such flourishing circumstances as to have any use for a pawn broker.—Texas Sifter.

Satisfactory Reference.

She—Our acquaintance has been so short that I feel I ought to know more about you before I can consent to become your wife.

He—Very well. I can refer you to any of the girls I have been engaged to.—Tit-Bits.

His Fear.

"I guess I had better give these biscuits to the first tramp that comes along," said Mrs. Hunnimune, with pathetic candor.

"No," exclaimed her husband, nervously, "don't do that. He might throw them at the dog!"—Washington Star.

Life-Long Devotion Assured.

Mrs. Social—And so Miss Flirtie is engaged to your son. Do you think she will be true to him?

Wise Dame—Oh, she'll be true to him as long as other women admire him, and I guess he'll be handsome all his life.—N. Y. Weekly.

Worth Makes the Man.

Widow—I loved him for his worth.

Friend—Quite so; quite so! I heard that he was worth about $20,000 a year.—Town Topics.

Why Escape Was Impossible.

"Yes; he fell over backwards, and sank like a stone."

"But I thought he was an expert swimmer?"

"He was; but my wife brought some of her biscuits for lunch, and he—"

"Oh!"—Bay City Chat.

Compensation in All Things.

"There is one thing that I must say for Blowhard, and that dangnation trombone of his."

"What's that?"

"He has driven all the cats into another neighborhood to do their serenading."—Detroit Free Press.

Too Deceptive.

"Why do you say Kitty violates the law by wearing a pink veil?"

"There's an ordinance which forbids putting red netting over peaches."—Chicago Record.

Slow Time Assured.

Mrs. Jinks—Yes, I've sent Sims, the colored man, for the doctor.

Mrs. Blinks—Sent Sims? Mercy me! He won't get there for two hours. He used to be a hotel waiter.—N. Y. Weekly.

Permanently Settled.

"Oh, my friend, you should reflect on the fact that we are here to-day and gone to-morrow," said the priest.

"You may be, but I ain't," replied the convict.—Tit-Bits.

—In the pupa state, the Hessian fly can scarcely be distinguished from a flaxseed.